

Keep on Movin: Ten Years of Magic: Pile celebrates with a livestreamed performance

Pile — *Magic Isn't Real*

Pile, the celebrated indie rock band with Boston origins recently marked the pandemic-delayed 10th anniversary of their fantastic album *Magic Isn't Real*, holding a livestream performance with their original lineup of Matt Becker, Matt Connery, Kris Kuss and frontman Rick Maguire. In the last decade, Pile has gained a legion of devoted fans and have become known as a “rock band’s rock band.”

Born out of the basement show scene in Allston, the band’s heavy but deeply harmonic sound defies categorization. *Magic*’s songs are as biting and angular as The Jesus Lizard, but way more dynamic, and jittery like Gang of Four, but with way better hooks.

“Number One Single” is a craggly jam with a stop-start feel and warp speed drumming. “Pets” is a catchy, sludge-pop number with downtuned warmth that makes it a modern classic.

Not unlike fellow Bostonians The Pixies, their sound feels experimental and edgy, but I found myself hitting the repeat button and don’t quite know why. The “But I was honest” refrain in the song “Octopus” is downright anthemic, and the soaring “Two Snakes” keeps you guessing the whole time.

Just when these songs approach conventional pop structures, they careen off into new and interesting directions. “Don’t Touch Anything” is my favorite, and remains a fan favorite as well (if Spotify data is to be believed).

I revisited the album with Mcguire by phone a few days before the livestream.

Jake Bissaro (Motif): *Magic* was the first Pile record with the full band lineup, right?

Rick Maguire: Yeah, it’s Matt Becker, Chris and I on the album. We went on our first tour in the fall of 2009, and a few months later Matt found out he was going to be a father, so we knew we had to get everything fully recorded and tracked by the following July.

JB: Did having a band affect the sound, as opposed to the earlier solo releases?

RM: I think so. With the full band, there was definitely a lot more room to experiment with dynamics, and it was good just generally having other people to bounce ideas off of.

JB: It seems like the album represented a bit of a breakthrough for you guys, at least in terms of a New England presence. What do you remember about the reception?

RM: I do remember it being pretty well-received. Around that time, we were playing way more basements than clubs, so the album started to open up a new world to us — new people, new music and new venues I didn’t even realize existed.

JB: It feels like now, there’s a sort of mythology built up around the Boston rock scene around that time. Do you have fond memories of it?

RM: Very much so. I think I have my own mythology about that time in some ways, but it was pretty exciting. I lived in a house with a bunch of people in bands, and within a two minute walk you could get to three different houses that had shows regularly. On some nights, there would be three or four happening, and you'd try to catch as much as you could.

JB: Which tracks are most memorable to you?

RM: It's strange; the ones that are more memorable now are the ones we haven't played all that much because of this anniversary show. I've formed new memories around the ones we've continued to play over the past 10 years. But having to relearn a song like "Levee," I have absolutely no idea what I was playing, and I had to think about what I might have done back then to help figure it out.

JB: What was the recording process like?

RM: Pretty smooth, from what I remember. It was recorded by Richard Marr at Galaxy Park Studios in Allston, now in Salem. I think we set aside just a week, and we recorded the album plus what ended up being the *Big Web 7*". We basically did everything live, but with additional takes punched in.

JB: Lyrically, it seems like many of the subjects are cloaked in metaphor. Was this an intentional move?

RM: I was going through some personal stuff at the time and I didn't want to be too overt. It just felt like a safer way to express myself, and maybe I thought it was a more powerful way to have different characters, or animals, tell the story.

JB: Do you now consider yourself a "Nashville Band" now that you've relocated? Does it even matter?

RM: I'm in Boston right now. I still very much like spending time here, and essentially split my time between the two places. But ultimately, wherever people want to say we're from is totally fine. It's semantics at this point.

JB: Any final thoughts on the album?

RM: I have my own personal and complicated feelings about it, but at this point it just feels like a picture of that period of my life.

Pile plans to write and record a new album later this year, slated for a 2022 release.

Buy Magic Isn't Real at Pile's bandcamp page.